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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [BG](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: SPECULATION ON BDG'S FAILURE TO CATCH JMB LEADERS

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b)

¶11. (SBU) On January 19, 2,000 police and paramilitary personnel cordoned off an area in Kushtia, 120 kilometers west of Dhaka, to hunt for fugitive JMB leader Bangla Bhai, according to police and media reports. Five helicopters, a huge deployment for Bangladesh, supported the effort reportedly triggered by a tip that senior JMB leaders were spotted at a local mosque. At nightfall, police imposed a curfew and told people to stay indoors until morning, and continued the search in this Indian border area.

¶12. (SBU) After police officials acknowledged the next day that Bangla Bhai remained at large, media and others quickly began speculating why the "fiasco" happened and what had actually triggered the massive manhunt. Some alleged that Bangla Bhai escaped because of police collusion or a tip from a government informant, while others said that Bangla Bhai and JMB supremo Abdur Rahman are already secretly in government custody. Another theme was that the BDG stage-managed the event just to suggest that it is serious about catching them, and another said the BDG wanted to bolster its standing before SA A/S Rocca arrives on January 26 to propose, local media say, a USD 100 million CT program with Bangladesh.

¶13. (S) On January 23, during a meeting with Peace Corps Chief of Security Pat Hogan (septel), Home Minister of State Babar told Charge that a paid JMB informant had told the BDG that two to three JMB leaders, and possibly Bangla Bhai, were among a group of 25 performing morning prayers at a rice mill in Kushtia. However, since there are more than 250 rice mills in that area, local police needed large reinforcements to identify the right mill and effectively cordon off escape routes from the area. Babar assured the Charge that the BDG is going full speed to arrest JMB leaders and knows that the fight against JMB does not end until at least Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman are arrested.

¶14. (S) Separately, DAO is reporting in its channels that an Indian High Commission source has confirmed an Indian press report that Indian police have arrested Abdur Rahman near Calcutta and are transporting him to New Delhi for interrogation. Babar told Charge he had no information on this report. We understand that Consulate Calcutta has been unable to confirm the arrest with police contacts, some of whom were not available because today is an Indian holiday. (Note: If Abdur Rahman is under arrest in India, this is politically explosive for the BDG as well as the opposition Awami League.)

¶15. (C) Comment: In the past week, local media have reported progress on the BDG's drafting of an Anti-Terrorism Act and an Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Act. It has also been reported widely that the USG has a USD 100 million CT program on tap for Bangladesh, which could be garble of the notional USD 100,000 ATA CT program we have broached to MHA. There's also been press reporting about a possible U.S.-Bangladeshi Counter-Terrorism Joint Working Group, an old initiative by Bangladesh U.S. Ambassador Chowdhury when he was Foreign Secretary to put Bangladesh on the same CT level as India and Pakistan. Regardless, there is a lot of spinning underway here in advance of A/S Rocca's visit to bolster the BDG's CT credentials. Catching Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman remains a key test for the BDG since both men are in a position to embarrass the BDG greatly if they start talking about their ties to senior police and BNP officials.

CHAMMAS